

# Community Health Care Chronic Pain Policy

## Opioid/Narcotic Facts for Washington State

- During 2004–2007, 1,668 WA residents had confirmed unintentional poisoning deaths due to prescription opioid related overdoses. Nearly half of these deaths were in the Medicaid population.
- Unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths increased 17-fold during 1995–2008.
- Hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses increased 7-fold during 1995–2007.
- Addiction treatment admissions, where prescription opioids were the primary drug of abuse, increased from 1.1% to 7.4% between 2000 and 2009.
- Prescription opioid-related overdose deaths now exceed non-prescription opioid-related overdose deaths.
- The death rate from unintentional poisoning exceeded the death rate from motor vehicle crashes in 2006.

## What We Know About Opioids/Narcotics

- Opiates are about 30% effective in treating pain.
- Long term use can make your body need more medication to treat the pain and can cause other areas of the body to feel pain.
- Everyday function is not always improved by using opiates for pain.

Because of these facts, Community Health Care has decided to stop using opiates to treat chronic pain. We believe there are non-narcotic options that will help treat chronic pain and improve your function without affecting your health in ways that opiates can. Community Health Care staff will continue to provide care for primary care issues and for pain, but will not prescribe opiate medication to treat chronic pain.

New chronic pain patients will have their medication reduced until they no longer use narcotic pain medication.

## Approved Chronic Pain Treatment

- Non-narcotic pain medication
- Specialty evaluation and treatment (Spine Clinic, Neurosurgery, Orthopedics)
- Physical Therapy
- Massage Therapy
- Alternative Therapies (acupuncture, chiropractic)
- Behavioral Health

## Pierce County Resources

### Tacoma Metropolitan Area:

**The Center for Substance Abuse Recovery**  
Tacoma Metropolitan Development Council  
721 South Fawcett, #101  
Tacoma, WA 98402 (253) 593-2740

**MOMS/Women's Recovery Center**

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department  
3408 South Union Avenue  
Tacoma, WA 98409 (253) 798-6655

**Pierce County Alliance**

*West Valley  
West Hill  
Catalytic*  
510 Tacoma Ave South  
Tacoma, WA 98402 (253) 572-4750

**Pioneer Adult Counseling**

758 St. Helens  
Tacoma, WA 98402 (253) 274-0484

**Sea Mar Community Health Center**

1516 South 11th Street  
Tacoma, WA 98405 (253) 396-1634

### Lakewood/Parkland Area:

**The Center for Substance Abuse Recovery**  
Lakewood Metropolitan Development Council  
8907 Gravelly Lake Drive S.W. #D  
Lakewood, WA 98499 (253) 593-2740

**MOMS/Women's Recovery Center**

South Tacoma-Pierce County Health Dept.  
12108 Park Avenue, Suite #G-7  
Tacoma, WA 98444 (253) 798-6655

This informational letter is for patients who have been taking narcotic pain medications for longer than 3 months for pain that is caused by something other than cancer. These medications include: Lortab/Vicodin (hydrocodone-acetaminophen), Percocet (oxycodone-acetaminophen), Oxycodone, Oxycontin, Morphine, Dilaudid (hydromorphone), Codeine, Fentanyl, Demerol (meperidine), Darvocet (propoxyphene), and Methadone.

**Dear Community Health Care Patient:**

As your primary care providers, we know that living with chronic pain can be very challenging. Recent research has provided new information on the use of narcotics for chronic pain as well as the serious impacts they can have on your health. Community Health Care is here to assist in improving your quality of life by helping to reduce the effects pain has on your activities of daily living, while minimizing side effects and making sure you are safe. Studies have shown that narcotics are unlikely to relieve all of your pain, and that, despite narcotic use, most patients' physical function does not improve. In addition, the risk of diversion (illegal resale), misuse, and accidental deaths from use of narcotic pain medication continues to rise in our country. As a result, Community Health Care has made the difficult decision to stop prescribing narcotics for chronic pain unrelated to cancer, or end-of-life care, for all of our patients.

Community Health Care is aware of the significant effect this may have on you and the community. We want to share the reasons for our decision, as well as provide you with some options and additional resources to help you manage your pain.

**Why This Decision Was Made**

- Narcotics are only about 30% effective in treating pain.
- Long term narcotic use changes brain responses to pain, and actually increases the brain's sensitivity to pain.
- Narcotics pose a danger of misuse, dependence, addiction, diversion (illegal resale), and overdose.
- Narcotics cause side effects in 80% of people who use them, including:
  - Respiratory depression (slow breathing that may cause death)
  - Physical dependence, tolerance, addiction
  - Depression
  - Weakened immune system
  - Increased risks of falls
  - Drowsiness, fatigue, and sluggishness
  - Itching
  - Nausea, vomiting, or anorexia
  - Low sex drive and impotence
  - Low blood pressure
  - Problems urinating
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Dizziness, and fainting
  - Constipation